

Upon leaving Pearl Harbor on a much smaller vessel, by October 28th we arrived on the Island of Palmyra, a tropical atoll, just a speck in the vast Pacific Ocean about a thousand miles South of the Hawaiian group, five degrees North of the Equator where we became part of the First Defense Battalion. After arrival, I recall I was part of a group of Marines on a work party unloading fifty pounds of bagged cement material for use by a Sea Bee battalion, the only other group on the island who were there to construct machine gun placements at different points thereon. During my work assignment, I was called to the upper deck by Sgt. Major Waldren who had my record book in his hand. He said, "Champagne, I see from your book here where you have had ten years of typing experience. How would you like to be a company clerk?" While I didn't know at the time what were the duties of a company clerk, I agreed to accept the offer for anything appeared to be better than handling bags of cement in the hold of a ship five degrees away from the Equator. It turned out to be a good deal for me. There were between three and four hundred men in a company and whereas most had either a clerk and an assistant or two clerks, I was able, after becoming familiar with my duties, to handle the job by myself. One of the advantages I appreciated was the fact that, because of my responsibilities, I was exempt from "Guard Duty".

Palmyra was a beautiful uninhabited island with coconut palms, tropical vegetation, hundreds of various types of birds. A common feature about atolls is that each has a lagoon. That of Palmyra was crystal clear and blue in color. As for the birds, there were frigates, terns, boobies, and curlews. There were two types of terns - some are sooty in color while others are white. The latter are commonly

referred to as "love birds" for they are always found in pairs. For a more elaborate description of the birds, that can be found in a letter I wrote to my mother on 21 February, 1943.

In the roughly one year I was stationed on Palmyra, I was able to play tennis now and then, using equipment from the recreational shop, learned to play "handball" which was extremely hard on my right hand without use of a glove, did some swimming in the lagoon, collected a number of small odd seashells from the abundance of coral reefs, and saw a lot of movies which were available every night at the theatre. In time I obtained a license to use a reconnaissance vehicle to deliver items, including beer and, if I remember correctly, mail to other Marines serving at outposts or batteries at several island points.

On 8 March 1943 I was promoted to Corporal, having been recommended by my commanding officer. That included a \$15.00 per month increase in pay because of foreign duty. However, because rates seemed to be passing out more frequent in the "Paymaster Department", equivalent to that of "Finance" in the Army, I applied for transfer to that department and in early April of 1943, it was approved as it was more or less in line with my abilities, but, temporarily, I had to return to PFC. However on 1 June, my rank as Corporal was reinstated.

Other than the First on Palmyra, The Marine Corps maintained Defense Battalions on the

islands of Johnston (or Johnson) and Midway. Including Palmyra there three flanked the Hawaiian group, but the First on Palmyra, about a thousand miles South, was too distant to draw the attention of the Japs. A small air wing was stationed there, however, but it was used daily for reconnaissance purposes. As everyone knows Midway was the only one of the three mentioned that was attacked. The Japs there suffered a heavy defeat that has often been termed as the "turning point" of the war. It was at the Battle of Midway where Marine pilot lost his life and is believed to be the first marine casualty from Honomia in a major US-Japanese engagement.

In October of 1943, our entire Marine Battalion on Palmyra was replaced by Army personnel, so we were told, and scattered to various bases. Our Paymaster unit wound up at Pearl Harbor where I was stationed until the end of World War II. Our commanding officer was Colonel John R. Halla whom, I found out later on, marine Captain Charlene Faught Crawley, Bonnie Duval's sister, knew quite well. The weather for the most part was simply delightful. I acquired new friends, enjoyed trips to Honolulu, and my attendance at St. Andrew's Episcopal Cathedral there often on Sundays. In scanning a few of the letters I wrote home I found I was part of a Klee Club in December of 1943, returned to a Rifle Range for refreshing in February of 1944 which resulted in qualifying as a sharpshooter, and on 1 February I was promoted to that of Sergeant.

My stay in the Harbor gave me a chance to play quite a bit of tennis which I always loved and early on I learned that Colonel Halla could often be found on the courts. It was said he only had one good eye, the other having been severely damaged in a much earlier marine